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DEVICES FOR VITALIZING COMPOSITION WORK WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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Of the devices tried for giving zest and vim to composition work *imitation* and *dramatization* have proved most effective in our high-school classes. Nor is this strange, for both these activities have a sound psychologic basis in human nature itself. The imitative and the dramatic instincts are found alike in the child of all times and races. To the free and unrestricted exercise of these impulses he owes much of his development. Who that has watched the child at play by himself or with others can doubt this? And what does a study of children's games reveal? They are nothing but little dramas of real life. The child instinctively acts out in his play the daily life he sees about him,

As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation.

According to our new educational theories, instincts should be impressed into our service and utilized for our ends. Hence conscious, deliberate imitation of masterpieces and dramatization here and there of bits of literature have been encouraged in our classes. And results have been good, so good in fact that we now consider this part of our work past the experimental stage. Imitation and dramatization have become regular features of our English courses. More interesting, indeed more important, than the direct results are the incidental benefits of such tasks. The effect of the work is far-reaching. As a vocabulary study it is most valuable. The search for the right word often sends the pupil by devious wordstrewn paths to his goal. This is particularly true if the exercise is to be in verse form. Again, the sense of having achieved—for the imitation or dramatization is an achievement—is stimulating to his creative power. But best of all is the fact that imitation

and dramatization induce appreciation, that elusive something so eagerly watched for—alas! too often in vain—by the literature teacher. The measure of the pupil's appreciation is his imitation or dramatization, and to judge by our products it is widespread throughout many of our classes.

Such exercises are a part of the composition work in all the four years of our English course. Among the masterpieces which offer fertile fields for imitative and dramatic work are the following: *The Odyssey* (Palmer's translation); the *Robin Hood Ballads*; the *Tales of a Wayside Inn*; the *Van Bibber Stories*; *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*; *Sohrab and Rustum*; *Ivanhoe*; Chaucer's Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*; the *Sir Roger de Coverley Papers*; Burke's "Speech on Conciliation"; Milton's "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," "Comus," and "Sonnets"; and Lamb's *Essays of Elia*.

An imitation is sometimes worked out jointly by the pupils and teacher in class. Then similar exercises are assigned as individual tasks. Subjects are often suggested by the teacher; at other times the choice is left to the pupils. The exercise is sometimes written in class, at other times at home. The pupils generally attack the problem with real zest, and take genuine pleasure in modeling after the master. They invariably show undisguised delight in listening to the efforts of their friends and fellow-workers.¹

The dramatizations which the pupils make of parts of the novel or poem they are reading are seldom reduced to paper, though every now and then a scene is written out in full. The pupils are told to prepare a certain chapter or situation for presentation in the class at the next lesson. They must devise the setting and arrange the reading of the dialogue with as much ingenuity and realism as they can muster. And they do it, and joy in the doing of it. Such exercises are found to be a great stimulus to the imagination, that much neglected faculty in our current educational scheme.²

It is only the occasional boy or girl who can do nothing with

¹ For a fuller exposition of this work see my article, "Imitative Writing in the High School," *Ped. Sem.*, December, 1910.

² For an elaboration of this idea see *Dramatization of High School Classics* by S. E. Simons and C. I. Orr.

these assignments. In such a case, of course, a substitute is allowed. The illustrations which I now quote are all of them typical. With perhaps one exception, noted below, the selection chosen is no better than many others in the same group. They are all first draft.

"DOWN TO THE SEA IN SHIPS"¹

"DEAR MR. VAN BIBBER," the note ran, "We were all so surprised to hear from Mr. Carstairs that you are still in this country, as we understood that you were to leave for Venice on the first. If your departure has been delayed long enough, would it be possible for you to join our little house party here for a week or so? Our place is right in the Catskills, with mountains all around and a lovely little lake for a front porch. It is a jolly party, nearly the same as the one at Miss Arnett's, so please come, if you can, as we are all so anxious to see you again before you leave, etc., etc."

Van Bibber reflected. The note was signed "Dorothy Martin" and though entirely heart-free, he was far from averse to the society of this particular maiden. Besides, he did not sail for nearly two weeks and he realized that it would be rather dull in the city with everyone away. He wired that he would arrive on the following evening.

When his train pulled in he was accorded a joyous welcome and at dinner that evening, various plans were proposed to make the following week an enjoyable one for the soon-departing guest. The lake figured largely in these plans and the question was raised, did Mr. Van Bibber care for the water?

"Of course he does!" cried Miss Martin before Van Bibber could speak, "Don't you remember his winter in Florida?"

"That's so," said one of the men, "then you will be just the one to sort of captain us, Van, for to tell the truth, none of us are very competent seamen."

Van Bibber swore beneath his breath at the foolish impulse which had led him into relating glowing, if largely mythical, tales of canoe and sailing trips, after his return from Palm Beach the year before, as his principal knowledge of water consisted of the facts that fish live in it and that it is a healthful if not very palatable beverage. However, he decided not to back down, because you know, he might possibly get through without drowning himself or anyone else. So he answered carelessly, "Oh yes, I have had some little experience," but he felt uncomfortable and dropped the subject.

The week following passed pleasantly and uneventfully, for some kind Providence, so Van Bibber devoutly believed, had steered the interests of the party away from the lake and Sunday had come around without a paddle disturbing the placid surface of the water. Monday would see him on his way to the city, so he began to breathe more freely. And then the blow fell.

¹ Imitation of the *Van Bibber Stories*. First Year.

"Oh, Mr. Van Bibber," cried Miss Martin, coming out on the porch with parasol and cushion, "do take me for a paddle! Here it is Sunday and we haven't been on the lake once, besides, it is so sultry on shore!"

Van Bibber looked around but everyone was comfortably paired off. There was no escape, so he led the way to the boat house, where he selected an ancient canoe, of unusual breadth of beam and badly in need of paint, which he had heard the caretaker say was safest for the ladies.

"But Mr. Van Bibber," said his companion, "the others are so much prettier!"

"Oh yes," replied Van Bibber, "but this will be more comfortable."

They embarked safely and every now and then as they talked, Van Bibber would very carefully insert his paddle and take a stroke, thus managing to acquit himself quite creditably.

The conversation was so engrossing that they paid no attention to their course, until, on rounding a little peninsula, a sound like rushing water caused Miss Martin to exclaim, "Why that must be the Rapids! I had no idea we were so close!"

Van Bibber began to take notice. He did not care for the sound of the word "Rapids." Sure enough, right ahead was the outlet of the lake, and there the water was rushing down a decline, foaming and splashing over rocks in a most alarming manner. It looked bad, and what was worse, Van Bibber perceived that they were drifting rapidly toward the broken water at the edge of the descent.

"What are you going to do?" asked his companion nervously, as she saw him start.

Their speed was increasing and Van Bibber realized that the canoe was beyond his control. "I er-think we will run them. The shore is too steep and rocky to land," he replied hastily.

Already the water was boiling under the bow of the canoe. The spray flew and the roar made Van Bibber wonder how he could ever have considered Niagara awesome. He closed his eyes, only to open them as a dash of water on his foot convinced him that they were sinking. Instead, the craft was fairly flying. The waves seemed about to engulf her. Their roar was as a thousand cataracts. A huge rock loomed up ahead. She must strike it! Involuntarily Van Bibber's eyes closed again. She struck with a grating shock. He must save his companion. He sprang wildly to his feet. She was sitting quietly opposite him. The canoe lay broadside to the sandy shore!

Silently they clambered out. Van Bibber looked back. The water roared and splashed happily over the rocks lining a perfectly clear channel. A child's rapids!

"I think," said he, "we will walk over to the house. I will send a man for the boat."

HOW THE CUCKOO LEARNED TO CUCKOO¹

A long time ago before birds could sing there lived by the sea a pretty wee gray bird with gray wings.

One morning he flew for the first time out of his soft nest and went down to the sea. It was a rather windy morning and the sea was dashing up against the rocks and singing a wonderful song. After the little bird had listened a dreadfully long time he said to the sea, "O great and wonderful sea whom all men do fear, pray tell me how you make so wonderful a noise?" But the sea only answered by dashing harder than ever against the rocks so that the little bird was scared and flew away.

The next morning the little bird went again and sat on the very same rock in the very same spot where it had sat the morning before. And after listening a dreadfully long time he said to the sea, "O great and wonderful sea whom all men do fear, pray tell me how you make so wonderful a noise?" But the sea answered just as he had before by dashing harder than ever against the rocks. So the little bird was frightened again and flew away.

The next morning was a beautiful windy morning and so the little bird thought he would go again to the sea and listen to the song. And after he had listened a great while he said to the sea, "O sea, whom all men do fear, pray tell me how you make such a wonderful noise?" And just at that identical second the sea stopped its wonderful noise and spoke with his wonderful voice saying, "O little bird listen to me and I will teach you how to make a noise so that you will become beloved of all mankind forever, and ever, and ever. Only first, little bird, you must promise me that every night you will think of me just as the sun is setting." And the little bird said, "I will promise."

Just then the sea began to make a noise just as soft and sweet as anything. The little bird listened and when the sea stopped he tried to make the noise and it sounded like this, "Cuckoo, Cuckoo." And the little bird was so pleased that he thanked the sea again and again for teaching him such a beautiful noise.

And the little bird never forgot his promise to the sea and that is why every single night just as the sun is setting the little gray bird begins and cuckoos until every little bird is sound asleep in his nest and every little baby in his mother's arms.

AN EVENING WITH FRIAR TUCK²

SCENE: A hermitage containing a rough table; a crucifix; two chairs; two stools; a rough bed and two closets, with open doors. A harp, quarter-staff, and several bows and arrows are seen in one closet. The other is the

¹ Imitation of the *Just So Stories*. First Year.

² Dramatization from *Ivanhoe*. Second Year.

hermit's pantry, which is well supplied with delicacies. A grey cowl and gown are thrown on the bed. As the curtain rises the Friar is discovered alone.

CHARACTERS: Robin Hood and Friar Tuck.

FRIAR (*looking out the door*): What has happened to my good Robin? I fear me the king is in some trouble; he should have been here by the rising of the moon. (Closes door and starts to prepare supper, but is interrupted by a loud knock.)

FRIAR (*Softly*) I must be cautious. (*Aloud*) Who passeth by this way so late and what do they wish at the lowly hermitage of St. Dunstan?

(*Friar quickly but quietly hides chairs in a corner; closes closets, and dons his cowl and gown.*)

VOICE: It is a poor wanderer, who begs a drink from the holy spring of the blessed St. Dunstan.

FRIAR: Wait thee until the faithful servant of St. Dunstan finishes his evening devotions.

(*A groan from without.*)

FRIAR (*severely*): Have patience.

(*Friar extinguishes one of the two torches which light his hut, and deadens the bright fire with wet moss kept for that purpose.*)

FRIAR (*mumbles to himself*): It is well I had some moss. He shall not know I am preparing for a feast tonight. And by the saints he shall draw the water himself!

(*Friar takes a small wooden cup and opens the door.*)

FRIAR: Weary wanderer the drink from the holy spring wherein the good St. Dunstan baptised five hundred heathen between sunrise and sunset will do thee far more good if thou dipst the water for thyself. Take the cup and follow this path to the holy spot.

WANDERER: Praised be the name of St. Dunstan.

FRIAR: May the good saint bless thee. (*To audience*) These weary wanderers are getting too troublesome of late. They interrupt my evening feasts.

WANDERER (*returning cup*): Thank thee, Holy Clerk, for the good thou hast done me.

FRIAR: Pass on thy journey in peace. (*Friar closes door.*) And still no Robin. (*Placing dainty food on table, removing cowl, and bringing chairs from the corner, Friar mumbles.*)

FRIAR: And that was a mighty slap the king laid upon his humble servant, and I think me the one I gave should not have been so hard had I but known it was—(*Loud knock.*)

FRIAR: That is surely Robin Hood. Whosoever passeth by—

VOICE (*impatiently*): Open to Locksley!

FRIAR: Ah! 'tis time. Why are you so late? Has something wrong befallen the Lion Hearted king?

ROBIN HOOD: No, Richard is safe with our trusty outlaws, but there was a fair maiden—

FRIAR: It seems to me you are too willing to aid fair damsels.

ROBIN: Ah! but she was in trouble. How did you enjoy your play with King Richard?

FRIAR (*angrily*): Speak not of that or by St. Dunstan you will regret it!

ROBIN: Come, good Friar, do not be angry. Let us fall to. This feast looks tempting.

FRIAR (*recovering his good spirits*): Take a chair and help thyself.

(*The two seat themselves and begin their dinner.*)

FRIAR (*with his mouth full of pastry*): Who was the fair lady whom you had to aid?

ROBIN: Ah! Ha! It was Isaac with the Lady Rebecca.

FRIAR: Where is my share of the spoils?

ROBIN: Do you think I would rob a helpless Jew?

FRIAR: Helpless, indeed!

ROBIN: Bring forth the harp and give us a tune. It has been many weeks since you and I have been together.

FRIAR (*getting harp*): I have not touched the good harp since the king was here.

ROBIN: Bring it forth and fill up our cups with the—

(*Robin is interrupted by a shrill blast. He springs to his feet.*)

ROBIN: Quick, on with thy cassock of green; we must out. Something is wrong.

FRIAR (*throwing off mantle and discovering suit of green*): There are too many wanderers about tonight.

ROBIN: Quick! Stop your foolish prating.

(*Robin and Friar leave the hut together.*)

THE DESERTED MILL¹

Beside the stream, that winds o'er yonder hill,
 There stands the dreary, silent water-mill.
 Here often have I seen the ripe corn ground,
 And, wond'ring, watched the busy wheel go 'round.
 But now those happy, prosperous days are fled,
 And in the eaves the owlets make their bed.
 This happy spot, which once such thrift displayed,
 Is now deserted by the hand of Trade,
 For she the ignorant souls to towns has lured,
 With stories false of wealth to be procured.
 But once, in those sweet days of long ago,
 The scene was one of mirth, and not of woe.

¹Imitation of the *Deserted Village*. Third Year.

The happy miller, careless, in his way,
 Sang lustily his cheery song all day.
 And every morn, in sunshine or in rain,
 The passers heard his tuneful, quaint refrain:
 "This world for each of sadness has its fill,
 So let us bear to'ard no one an ill-will."
 On market-day, in finery bedeckt,
 His wife would come the mill-place to inspect.
 With her she often brought her only child,
 A tender blossom like the roses wild.
 Perchance, oh stranger, turning from the way,
 You see a spot, hidden from light of day.
 Bend closer! see, beneath the tangled weeds
 There lies a stone, and the inscription reads:
 "Beneath this sod there rests a gentle maid,
 But like the dainty blossoms, she did fade.
 In London-town she lived a year, you see;
 But smoke and fog with her did not agree;
 And so we brought her here where flowers abound,
 And laid her body gently in the ground."
 Yes, stranger, wipe the tears you vainly shed,
 And then—with gentle reverence, bow your head.
 This maid was not the only one to die
 When farmers heard the town's alluring cry.
 Far better had it been for them to dwell
 In ignorance, in some sequestered dell,
 Than to attempt a life of ease and pride.
 Far better, yes, far better to have died!
 For, when a man is made for work and toil,
 'Tis useless the Creator's plan to foil.
 Then let each with his own lot be content,
 And thus he can consider life well-spent.

TO MY VALENTINE¹

O thou, than any other, art more fair,
 Thy lips are like the coral reefs at sea,
 On which full many a sailor wrecked may be,
 And o'er thy shoulders streams thy golden hair.
 But when I look into thine azure eyes
 From which thou gives't me many a loving glance,
 I see both mirth and sunshine in them dance;
 Then dream I that I'm gazing at the skies.

¹ Imitation of *Elizabethan Songs*. Fourth Year.

Thou seems't to me to breathe a purer air,
 An atmosphere more fitting to thy grace.
 The purer air of heaven is thy place.
 (O would that I might have of it a share.)
 O lady fair, for thee alone I pine,
 Pray, wilt thou be mine own true Valentine?

SONNET¹

To those the night is blind, who take delight
 In nought but pleasure and in follies free.
 To those 'tis given, who love the shadowy night,
 Its spaces infinite, its starry sea,
 To look beyond, far past, the glittering bound
 That garish day hath fixed as furthest mark
 Of human eye, and with cleared vision, sound
 The inmost depths of Heaven-revealing dark.
 The sight may pass the utmost stars that lie,
 By hand Divine placed nearest to his seat;
 The eye may pierce beyond, but to the eye
 Black void is there unless a vision sweet
 To inward eye gives grace, to see such light
 As saintly Milton saw, through endless night.

**"THE NECESSITY OF LOWERING THE STEPS AND PUSH-BUTTONS
 OF THE LOCAL STREET CARS." A SPEECH DELIVERED
 BEFORE THE COMMISSIONERS OF THE DISTRICT²**

I hope, Gentlemen, that, notwithstanding the great number of times that this subject has been discussed before you, your good nature will incline you to some degree of indulgence toward human frailty. Surely it is an important subject, or there is none so which engages the attention of the entire feminine population.

My proposition is the convenience of the travelling public. Not the convenience of the corporation, whose sole interest is to make money. Not the convenience of the wealthy, with their touring-cars. Not the convenience of the manufacturer, who wishes to save time, labor, and material. Not the convenience of the young athlete, with his strength and agility. It is the simple convenience of the vast army of people who must use the cars daily in pursuing their vocations. I propose, by removing the grounds of difference, and by restoring the former comfortable equipment of the cars, to give permanent satisfaction to the people; and to reconcile them to the workings of a corporation which now seems to consider not their convenience, but only its private gain.

¹ Imitation of Milton. Fourth Year.² Imitation of Burke. Fourth Year.

The capital leading questions on which you must this day decide are these two: First, whether the company ought to concede; and, secondly, what the concessions ought to be. To enable you to determine both on the one and the other of these questions with a firm and precise judgment, I think it may be necessary to consider distinctly the true nature and the peculiar construction of the object which you have before you.

The thing that you have to consider with regard to the nature of the object is, the large number of cars, all of this objectionable construction, in the possession of the company, which have been purchased within the last year or two.

You must next consider the peculiar construction of the cars. The lowest step is so far from the ground that it cannot be reached without great difficulty. The push-buttons on the interior of the cars are so high that they cannot be used without rising from one's seat.

Then, Gentlemen, from these two capital causes: the height of the steps from the ground; the inaccessible location of the buttons—a spirit of indignant protest has grown up among the people.

In consideration of the first of the two capital questions, i.e., whether the company ought to concede, I say that if a corporation wishes to succeed, it must consider the desires of its patrons. The wishes of these patrons should not be sacrificed to mere financial gain, especially in the instance of a corporation formed, supposedly, for the convenience of the people at large, and upon which they so necessarily depend, and which they so constantly patronize. Hence the corporation should yield to the popular demand. It remains to be seen what the concession ought to be.

We grant that these cars were purchased without the knowledge that they would prove so inconvenient to the patrons; and as they are all new stock, we do not go so far as to demand that they be disposed of at a sacrifice, and entirely new cars be bought. But with a comparatively small expenditure the cars could be reconstructed and the faults complained of be remedied.

In behalf of the company, some one may say that the cars are entirely satisfactory in all other respects; that the evils referred to are but minor ones; and that the company should not be put to any expense. But we maintain that the aforesaid evils are not minor, but very serious ones. So much so that the question of expense should not be taken into consideration. Generally speaking, the cars are more used by women, children, and elderly people, than by the young, strong, and athletic; and to all except those of the latter class, the question of climbing to an exceedingly high step involves danger as well as serious inconvenience. To sum it all up, we may say, an evil that can be remedied should not be tolerated.

Therefor, Honorable Commissioners, I move you—

That since the high step and inaccessible button are very inconvenient, the company remedy these evils in some manner satisfactory to the travelling public.